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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000895

SIPDIS

SECSTATE FOR EUR/SCE:JERRY ISMAIL AND PM/WRA:MARK ADAMS AND
JERRY ISMAIL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018
TAGS: PARM PGOV PREL NATO AL
SUBJECT: RE: THE WAY AHEAD ON ALBANIANS MUNITIONS
DEMILITARIZATION

REF: A) SECSTATE 128582 B) TIRANA 878

Classified By: Ambassador John Withers for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. Summary. On December 16, Ambassador delivered talking points in reftel a to Minister of Defense Gazmend Oketa. In response, Oketa noted that he has agreed to provide a letter to either Secretary Rice or Assistant Secretary Kimmit reporting progress in Albania's demil efforts. Oketa reported that with today's destruction of three sheds containing unstable primer at Polican, both Polican and Mjekes are technically ready to begin industrial demilitarization. He admitted the need to improve the management of demil efforts and suggested a new structure for demil coordination. He again raised concerns that the USG has not agreed to help modernize Polican. Oketa acknowledged under-spending of demil funds as well as MoD funds in general and described his efforts to ameliorate the situation. Finally, the Minister of Defense requested that the USG be the lead-nation in long-term NATO demil assistance in Albania. End Summary.

STARTING THE LINES

¶2. (C) The destruction today of three sheds at Polican containing mercury fulminate was widely publicized. In interviews at the site, Oketa declared Polican and Mjekes technically ready to begin demilitarization. However, Oketa acknowledged to the Ambassador that the MoD has yet to resolve several legal issues (including the legal status of Polican and Mjekes and their contracts with the MoD) before demil can actually begin. Oketa has set January 2 as the "final, final" date for commencement.

MANAGEMENT

¶3. (C) Oketa acknowledged that his current demil czar Fatmir Bozdo's lack of any legal authority impedes his role in managing demil efforts. Oketa has suggested a new structure for his demil coordination team. One step would be to place Bozdo directly under the CHOD. Comment: It is unclear how this would alleviate management problems. Sources in the MoD state that Oketa's original plan was to place the DCHOD in charge of the demil coordination team, but the DCHOD balked. Now the sources are saying that the MoD General Secretary will head the committee. End Comment. Also under the proposed new structure, Mjekes and Polican - which are currently quasi non-state entities outside of MoD's budget -

would return to MoD control, allowing the CHOD to give them orders and allowing the MoD to use its budget for Mjekes and Polican.

POLICAN

¶ 14. Oketa again raised concerns over the disparity of modernization between Mjekes and Polican (reftel b). He acknowledged that Mjekes has used its own funds to modernize and that Polican does not have sufficient funds of its own. He noted that the MoD has not been able to fund Polican's modernization because of Polican's non-state status. He expressed frustration that the USG has allotted USD 8.4 million in assistance and has pledged USD 2 million per year in the future, but does not use USD 200,000 of it to modernize Polican (the cost of modernizing based on efforts Mjekes has made). He expressed confusion as to "why US contractors are receiving USD 2 million a year" simply to supervise and advise Albanian demil efforts. His staff present at the meeting claimed it was their original understanding that the US contractor would actually be executing the demilitarization of the 82mm rounds, not just supervising Albanian efforts.

FUNDING

¶ 15. The Minister admitted under-spending funds for demilitarization. He stressed his continued preference for working with the Ministry of Finance to set up a Special Fund that would not expire annually. However, he noted the

Minister of Finance's opposition to such a plan. Oketa highlighted his intention to use some of the existing demil funds to equip a second line at Mjekes.

¶ 16. When the Ambassador addressed under-spending throughout the MoD budget, Oketa stated that the ministry had failed to complete several modernization procurements, including helicopters and night-vision goggles. He noted small efforts he will take to obligate some funds by the end of the year, but felt it was better to be publicly honest about the MoD's procurement mistakes than to push through spending simply to reach two percent GDP. He stressed that in 2009, the budget will be one of his highest priorities and he intends to review it weekly or semi-weekly.

NATO

¶ 17. The Ambassador pointed out to Oketa that the NATO Strasbourg Summit would be a perfect time to announce significant progress on demilitarization and offered to help Albania get NATO more involved in demilitarization efforts in Albania. Oketa noted that there had been recent concerns over Greek remarks at NATO concerning Albanian and Croatian accession. The Ambassador responded that he thought it unlikely for Greece to pose opposition to accession this late in the process. A greater concern to the Ambassador was the political turmoil in Greece and how it could indirectly slow down parliamentary ratification of accession to NATO. In conclusion, Oketa requested that the United States become the lead nation in future NATO demil assistance in Albania.

WITHERS